

The Ballarat Naturalist

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“Postcard from the Sedg”

(from Jenny and Peter Sedgwick)

All through Autumn and into Winter, we had been waiting and hoping and getting worried about the arrival of the Flame Robins to the Grenville area. Finally, they arrived!

Pete found this pocket full of them while riding the push bike along the edge of a plantation, tucked away well out of sight. It intersected with picturesque pastoral land, offering shelter from wind, with thick foliage on one side and open pasture on the other. The next day, same conditions, same spot, same numbers he managed to work close enough to get a few group and individual pics (see above).

It was great to see such numbers. One pair of Scarlet Robins comingled, but there were Australian Pipits, European Goldfinches, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Superb Fairy-wrens as well.

Over the next couple of days we spent a couple of happy and productive hours watching and taking some photos. The maximum caught on the fence-line in one snap was 14, dominated by males.

What an unexpected and delightful interlude to brighten lockdown!

And a great way to brighten up our newsletter, too Ed.



But a few days later, the wind had gone around, the weather changed and the birds had dispersed. Numbers dropped from 2 pairs to one pair, then gone. Unfortunately, they did not arrive as hoped, closer to home near the Yarrowee River.

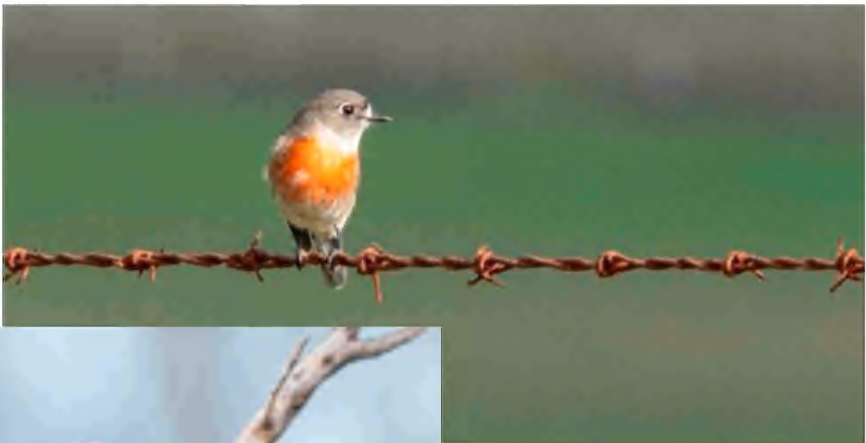
In past years we have observed between many and none, but this year despite frequent cold, close, Covid necessitated walks, our tally is one male, once.

Introducing Mr Flame Robin, with flare and flair, and his mate, elegant in plain colours. They should not be confused with their close rellies, Mr and Mrs Scarlet Robin, below. In comparison, the male is less coloured down the chest, of a

scarlet shade, a blacker black and has a larger white spot on his forehead.

Note she sports a blush on her chest.

Both love the open paddocks with a fence, a stray thistle or bare sticks to sit on before pouncing on their next meal. But it's the Flames that get together in groups over the winter months, before heading to cooler climes as the weather warms.



Field Reports

Report from Nerrina historical reserve, east of White Swan Rd.
Flame Fungus *Clavulinopsis sulcata* (Thanks John Petheram)



Georgina Kate (Rat Nats Facebook Group) shared this picture of a Lowland Copperhead snake. It was captured (on film at least) at Yendon.



The Great Southern Bioblitz 2020

Your opportunity to get out into the field and gather some important data on biodiversity in our neighbourhood—and have some fun as well.

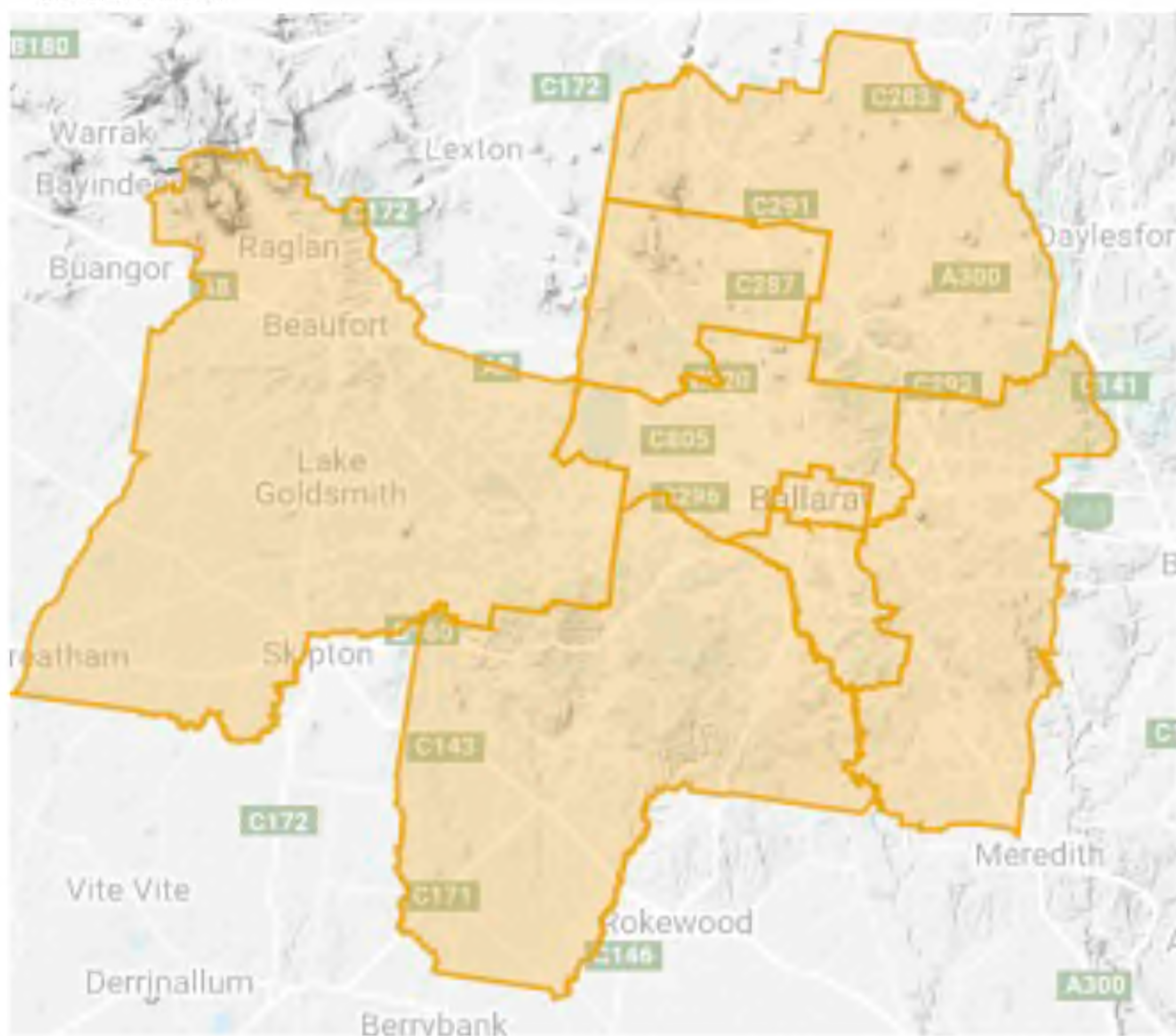
FNCB is joining with hundreds of communities and individuals all over the southern hemisphere to collect observations of nature—plants, fungi, animals, birds, reptiles, insects, fish etc..

It all happens over four frantic days - September 25 to 28, 2020.

As you can see from the map below, our area is huge and takes in the City of Ballarat, parts of Moorabool, Hepburn, Pyrenees and Golden Plains Shires. What it means is that we need members from all over the region to participate.

Starting midnight on 25th, visit your favourite nature haunts and record as many things as you can with your camera. Make a note of the location, preferably with a GPS reference (your smartphone could provide this). Gather together the images and other info and enter them into iNaturalist. If you are not currently an iNaturalist user, you may want to consider joining up, or you can send your observations data to an iNaturalist guru in the Club.

Bill will be sending out an invitation and more information by email soon.



The Rat Nats—Juniors Group

As Winter and COVID-19 roll on and juniors are back into home-schooling, the Facebook Group has been also rolling on.

This month we've been treated to images of moths during National Moth Week and more recently, a series of snapshots on Favourite Birds. Each week a new bird is introduced with a description and some photos from "Stringybark" in Scarsdale. We've learned about the Common Bronzewing, White-winged Chough, Silvereye, Sacred Kingfisher, and Eastern Yellow Robin.

Although there are no plans yet to resume outings, everyone is urged to take advantage of the finer spring weather which we know is around the corner. Get outside, get close to nature and enjoy getting to know your local birds, animals and plants.

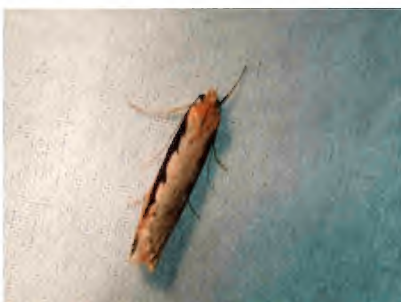
Silvereye
Zosterops lateralis



Bark Moth
Scioglyptis sp.



Common Gum Emerald
Prasinocyma semicrocea



Diamondback
Moth
Plutella xylostella

...From the Archives...

Early Warrenheip excursions (with thanks to Susan Kruss)

July 1882:

The second excursion began with a horse-drawn omnibus taking the group to the Melbourne Road viaduct. They then walked along the railway towards Warrenheip. The railway cuttings ‘were examined with great interest, as in their banks the different strata could plainly be traced’.

After walking to Mt Warrenheip the steep slope was climbed but just as they reached the top a mist rose up and obscured the view. However, they examined the blocks of lava and deduced that they must have been thrown up out of the volcano perpendicularly, fallen back again covered with lava, and thrown up again until at last they fell outside the crater. Descending the mountain and finding that the train would not arrive for some time, the group marched back to Ballarat arriving just as the train came in.

July 1915:

The first excursion on 3 July 1915, in the middle of winter, was led by Charles Fenner. Twenty-nine people travelled by large dray and cab to the Gong Gong Water Reserve where Charles Hoadley wrote they ‘made acquaintance with the various rocks of the vicinity and particularly of the mud thereabouts’, then to Mt Warrenheip where they climbed to the top. After a talk on the nature of volcanoes, and on the timber and scrub seen there, they returned to the foot of Mt Warrenheip where a cup of tea was made by the ladies. They arrived home at 6.30pm.



Caring for Creswick and its Biodiversity

Natural areas of special value to us north of Ballarat are under many threats to loss of biodiversity and tranquility. In addition to growing pressures from illegal camping and firewood removal, poor gold prospecting practices, off-road use of vehicles including bikes - there are proposals for major infrastructure like a new Power Transmission Corridor and the 100 km Creswick Mountain-bike Trail.

The COVID restrictions (and increased gold values) seem to be putting extra pressures on Creswick's public forests and the ability of public land managers to control wanton damage. High visitor numbers are causing high levels of damage to heritage and ecology, as seen in examples of photos below.

Here's an update on what the Club has been doing plus some ideas on how members can get involved and contribute to caring for these precious areas:

Western Victoria Transmission Network Project

Some members have submitted general views on the siting of the corridor to the survey on the Project website. While most people agree that a new Power Corridor is needed to allow growth in renewable energy, many believe it would be better to widen the existing corridor through Invermay, rather than build a new corridor through public forest. Club members and the public can also show places of special interest by placing pins (and photos) on to the special mapping tool. It is interesting to see what special places have been marked by other residents on the map.

The proposed Creswick Trails Project

In mid 2020, the FNCB wrote several letters of concern to agencies and then in April 2020 a sub-committee sent detailed assessments on the highly invasive trail 'Alignment Zones' proposed by Hepburn Shire, within 10 km of the Ballarat Council boundary.

We suggested shortening the length and numerous other changes to bike alignments. There are also ten 'conditions' that we suggested should be met to make the proposal more friendly to nature, wildlife and to the rights of passive forests users. Examples of conditions are that no 'racing events' be held in the Regional Park and that trails not be sign-posted for 'Bikes Only'.

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Field Reports

Being prompted by John's item in a recent newsletter we realised we were suffering Nature Deficit Disorder and on Friday 15th May we headed in the Lal Lal Falls direction. A walk to the right (west) of the Moorabool Falls pathway along the north bank led to the place where Anchor plants *Discaria pubescens* were planted in about 1988 by a group of Ballarat Field Nats.



It was rewarding to see the plants were still growing and looked healthy although it is doubtful they have self-seeded much, if at all. We counted about 13 plants.

This was a project we undertook with a bicentennial grant. Other sites we planted included Mooramong homestead, Neville Oddie's property and the Snizort property towards Clunes. We collected seed (sometimes treacherous), tried a variety of growing ideas, potted them up and then planted them out in preferred habitats which is basalt escarpments beside streams. They were watered for about the first summer using buckets with a rope attached and dipped (awkwardly) into water. We built stiles at Snizort.

It was rewarding to observe on a lovely sunny day that these locally endangered plants were still growing.

Claire and Peter Dalman



A close up reveals why it is called the “Anchor Plant”



Caring for Creswick con'td (from p. 7)

Objections were also made to the existing 35km of bike trails illegally built by bikers with a view to inclusion in the Project. Parks Victoria closed some of the trails in heritage areas, but these were later reopened by bikers.

Building of the massive Trails Project was intended to be completed in 2020, but the Shire still has to apply (to itself!) for a Planning Permit later this year. About \$4M of public money has been spent on planning the Project and the cost of construction would be a further \$4M, including payments for vegetation offsets.

FNCB intends to ensure that any approval of the Project or trails

meets our requirement for protecting biodiversity and heritage values. Some of our members and other groups have been collecting information on plants, birds, animals and heritage in the proposed Project area.

We hope to use the Bioblitz process later this year to add to information. We would love to get photos and other evidence of rare species, but also good photos of the whole range of biota in the area. All members with special interests are urged to become involved this spring.

Wombats and Koala have been sighted recently and

we need further evidence of these and other species. If you have records or expertise on birds, aquatic species, invertebrates or reptiles or heritage sites, your information could be very valuable. It has been suggested that rare frog species and even platypus could be found in some of the permanent water sites in the forest.



*Historic water race
ruined by mountain bikes*

John Petheram



Unauthorised mountain bike trails, jumps and berms are rife in the Creswick Regional Park and Sate Forest

Member News

FNCB has been pleased to welcome several new members over recent months:

Selena Prior and family

Selena, partner Nigel and kids are also interested members of our Rat Nats Junior Facebook Group.

Fiona Mulholland

Fiona is active on iNaturalist with observations of fungi as her first three entries.

Jenny and Peter Sedgwick

Familiar names to many field nats, Jenny and Peter are also members of the nature photography group.

September's Club Meeting is online!!!!

And why not! The committee has been using "Zoom" to keep in touch and run its monthly meetings quite successfully. Last month we had our first guest speaker online with 20 members attending remotely.

Now we want to include everyone in the September Club meeting by joining us on Zoom for a Members' Images evening.

Meeting starts at 7.30 pm on Friday Sept 4th, 2020

This is your chance to share some of your observations and items of interest over the past few months. Of course, being online means we will have to do it a little differently. Firstly, you will have to have Zoom on your computer, laptop, tablet or smart phone. Secondly, you need to send copies of your images to President, Bill Elder who will run the meeting, calling each member to present their items in turn and Bill will show/share the images. Attach photos, videos or whatever to an email at least a day before the meeting please.

If you want to take part and don't know how to set up Zoom on your device, please get in touch with Bill or Graeme Lunt (see below) for "tech support". Otherwise, ask a friend, neighbour or family member for assistance. It should be a fun, new way of sharing our images and nature interests.

Committee

President	Bill Elder
Vice Pres	Margaret Rich
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
	Andy Arnold
	John Gregurke
	Les Hanrahan
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
	John Petheram

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Email: Secretary:- Emily Noble

Editor: Bill Elder

Treasurer Kathy Elder

Website: <http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com>

Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings and Excursions (face-to-face) are cancelled until further notice owing to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

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